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SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR

RITES OF PASSAGE

BIRTHDAYS AND BAPTISM

IN the traditional culture of the Middle East (urban, village, or nomad), the status of midwife is a very important one. Midwives are invariably local women past menopause, and men are rigidly excluded from the house while the birth is taking place (cf. Granqvist, 1947, pp. 56–60).

Only one villager was born during the period of study, and the event took place in Beirut (the family is in the Summer Resident category) some time before the writer learned of it. The majority of Munṣif's housewives of childbearing age live in the city most of the year, and for the most part they clearly prefer the services of physicians and hospitals in important medical matters.

Once born, the modern village infant, judging from the very few cases observed, spends his time in a crib and is not swaddled restrictively. After the first few weeks, he may be fed from a modern nursing bottle. Factory-made toys are not very common in Lebanon, but small cars and trucks and at least one tricycle were observed in the village.

Birthday anniversaries are celebrated in a few families. There is a cake with candles, and the whole affair is new, probably inspired by experiences in American boarding schools.

Baptism is performed anywhere from forty days to about two years after the birth of the child. It appeared that the mode tended toward the latter age. The ritual is accompanied by at least a family party, but in some cases, according to one informant, the baptismal party may approach a wedding party in size.

ENGAGEMENT AND MARRIAGE

Engagement. Engagement (*khuṭbi*) is a more or less formal status. Quite often the couple simply declare themselves engaged, with the tacit approval of the priest. If both parties are members of the village, the priest's only official concern is that they are more distantly related than first cousin. If they are first cousins, it is his duty to inform them that he will be unable to marry them. In any case, the couple may or may not come to the priest for his blessing. Wedding rings (plain gold bands) are worn by both parties on the right hand to signify engagement. At the marriage ceremony, they are transferred to the left. Engaged couples may see each other alone at any time, and no questions are asked. Young

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"catches" the feast. For example, the Feast of Elijah, Mar Ilyaas, (July 20) passed without much remark. It was said that many people often went on this day to Bukha'z of whose church Mar Ilyaas is the patron saint, but this activity was not observed. At Gharzuuz, there is a man who every year summons the priest to help him "catch" the Feast of the Forty Martyrs (*'iid al-arbá'iin shuhada*), March 9. It may be that all twenty of the Church's feast days are given special recognition in al-Qurnı, if not in each of its individual villages.

The most important part of the religious year is unquestionably Easter, "the Great Feast" (*'iid al-kabiir*), preceded by Lent which is the longest of the numerous fast periods enjoined by the Church. Orthodox fasts forbid the eating of meat, eggs, cheese, and milk. Lent is preceded by a week (*marfa'*) during which meat is eaten every day, which is not the ordinary practice. The Thursday of *marfa'* is known as *al-khamiis as-sakiir*—"Drunken Thursday." On this day tipsy riotousness is expected and excused.

The first week in Lent, following *marfa'*, is *Jim'a al-bayaad*, "the week of whiteness." Eating meat is strictly forbidden. Only "white" things—eggs, *laban*, and cheese are supposed to be eaten. The following week, these *and* meat are forbidden until Easter. Until Easter, no one is supposed to eat breakfast; many abstain from coffee and from drinking water in the morning. It was stated, however, that many people do not adhere absolutely to fast regulations, and there is considerable variation in this aspect of religious behavior.

On Palm Sunday (*ash-shá'niini*) palm fronds are prepared by the head of every household in which there is a child under seven years of age. Once a little child has had this done for him, it is not done for him again. The fronds are hung with cakes and candies, and placed in the middle of the church. After mass, the people go outside with the fronds and gather around the priest for a further blessing. Then everyone rushes on the fronds and pulls off all the eatables. Between Palm Sunday and Good Friday there are evening prayers every day in the church.

On Good Friday (*al-jinaaz al-masiih*) everyone goes to church, even those who are in mourning, since it is a sad occasion. Mourners do not ordinarily go to regular mass nor to mass on Easter. It was said that even mourners of a year's standing or more may not go to mass at all—except on Good Friday. If there is no priest in any of the other Qurnı villages, the people there come to Munsif for the service.

The Good Friday mass was attended by at least four hundred persons. It is featured by the placing of a table (*matil*) in the center of the church. This is used at ordinary funerals for holding the coffin. Each house prepares a crown of flowers and candles which is placed on the *matil*. Towards the end of the mass, the *matil* is held aloft by four to six tall men near the door. All the people pass underneath it, out the door, and enter through the second door again.

On Easter eve of the year of this study, a special party for the adolescents